

STRATEGIES FOR PLAYBUILDING

based on a theatre methods textbook by Will Weilger (2001)

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ELEMENTARY FOCUS: K-6, Lesson Plan – 6th Grade Specific. Adaptable across all elementary grade levels.

THEATRE CORE PORTFOLIO TARGET: CONSTRUCTING DRAMA – Students will make dramatic presentations for themselves and others and discuss their creative work.

UTAH THEATRE CORE STANDARD: STANDARD 1: PLAYMAKING – The student will plan and improvise plays based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history for informal and formal theatre.

STUDENT CORE OBJECTIVES for STANDARD 1 – PLAYMAKING:

Objective 1

Collaborate to select interrelated characters, environments, and situations that create tension and suspense for informal and formal theatre.

Objective 2

Plan dialogue and physical attributes focusing on characterization for informal and formal theatre.

Objective 3

Collaborate to create and improvise a short play or musical that demonstrates an understanding of plot elements. (Connects with Language Arts Core.)

CONNECTING THE DOTS – TEACHER WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES:

(1) To be able to create an original performance piece using drama and vocal music entitled: **Don't Be Disrespectin' Me**

(2) To be able to plan a CLASSROOM DRAMA UNIT using the Natural Progression Pattern Sequence Chart (*Bloom's Taxonomy* applied to the THEATRE CORE)

(3) To be able to employ SIFT "playmaking" strategies in addressing real life social issues that are meaningful to the school community, including the ability to teach the LIFE SKILLS CORE through THEATRE. (Weilger's book *Strategies for Playbuilding*.)

(4) To enjoy doing THEATRE, while connecting meaningfully with other teachers.

SIFT ISSUE: Disrespect (SIFT = Social Issue Focused Theatre)

LIFE SKILL FOCUS: Character – "Character is Doing What's Right When Nobody is Looking." (See attached "CHARACTER" page from Utah Life Skills Core.)

PROCEDURES – FOR BUILDING AN ORIGINAL “SIFT” PIECE USING DRAMA AND VOCAL MUSIC WITH STUDENTS

INTRODUCTION (5 minutes) **Joy** and **Xan**

1. **LYRIC BUILDING** (10 minutes) – **Joy** will engage teachers in singing childhood songs they already know by heart. Then, **Joy** will challenge teachers to make up new lyrics about life as a teacher in public education. Any lyrics will do at this point, even the famous “LA LA LA’s.” (WEILGER: Developing Ensemble & Building Skills; BLOOM: Identifying and Experiencing.)

Indicators of Success

Students will be able to demonstrate the vocal skills of volume, rate, expressiveness, and character.

Students will be able to demonstrate strong and consistent movement choices that communicate lyrics and character intentions.

Students will understand giving and taking focus.

Students will be able to successfully identify and experience musical theatre form.

2. **CHARACTER CAPTURES** (15 minutes) – (a) **Xan** leads teachers in learning to balance the stage and identify individual working space. Then, (b) **Xan** will challenge teachers to move randomly in space while maintaining balance and working space. Then, (c) **Xan** will challenge teachers to freeze in STRIKING PHYSICAL SHAPES. (WEILGER: Developing Ensemble & Building Skills; BLOOM: Identifying and Experiencing.) (d) **Xan** will challenge teachers to move in balanced space, then, whenever **Xan** says “COMPLAINT,” teachers stop moving, find and face an available partner, and then take turns using **CHARACTER CAPTURES** to role-play student complaints brought to them by students about being disrespected, with all complaints beginning and ending with the phrases, “Teacher ... and that’s the truth.” (WEILGER: Identifying and Investigating a Topic; BLOOM: Exploring and Contextualizing.)

Teacher note: It is tempting to lampoon your students, but the goal is to capture the essence of the story given by the complaining character in terms of their vocal, physical, and emotional tags or qualities.

Indicators of Success

Students will be able to demonstrate understanding and application of specific drama techniques when engaged in drama activities.

Students will be able freely explore and contextualize drama skills and content when exploring SIFT issues and Life Skills.

Teacher Note: What does disrespect look like and sound like? Where does disrespect come from? Origins of disrespect often grow from power differences, attention needs, family trauma transfer, performance bullying, criminal behavior, poverty issues, addiction, physical and mental disabilities, and differences in race, gender, religion, individuality, language, ethnicity, and even learning styles ... just to mention a few. No naming names in-role.

3. **MANTLE OF THE EXPERT** (10 minutes) – All teachers sit in one large circle (on the floor preferably, but in a chair if necessary). **Xan** and **Joy** lead a discussion about “disrespect” by exploring the following questions – each teacher being a potential expert in some aspects of the theme DISRESPECT. (Dorothy Heathcote methods book *Drama for Learning/Mantle of the Expert*)

Teacher note: Write down those things you want to be sure to include in the original piece for presentation.

What are the many faces (behaviors – scenarios - images) of DISRESPECT?

How does DISRESPECT start?

What makes DISRESPECT continue?

What leads people to do something about DISRESPECT?

What changes people's minds about DISRESPECT?

What stops DISRESPECT cold?

What divides people over DISRESPECT?

What unites people over DISRESPECT?

What else do we need to know about DISRESPECT?

(WEIGLER: Building Dialogue, Lyrics, and Choreography (Forms); BLOOM: Analyzing/Connecting and Systems)

Indicators of Success

Students will demonstrate the ability to successfully engage in discussion about an engaging social issue, while not making personal attacks or accusations.

Students will be able to analyze and connect personal and/or secondary (literature or research) sources about a specific social issue important to them and to their school and community.

4. TRANSFORMATIONS (10 minutes) – Still in a CIRCLE, **Xan**, with the help of the teachers, selects one COMPLAINT STORY. Then, with the help of teacher volunteers, **Xan** demonstrates how to transform the COMPLAINT STORY into each of the following **POTENTIAL THEATRE FORMS**:

SCENE (create dialogue between two or more people)

SOLILOQUY (victim thoughts, bystander thoughts big circle)

SONG (Review lyric building as Joy presented, but move on)

GREEK CHORUS (choral speaking, small groups, entire cast)

MIME (detailed movement and gesture are critical)

DANCE (often used as a substitute for violence, i.e. *West Side Story*)

TABLEAU (use at least three tableaux with in-role transition action)

PUPPETS (using a shoe or something creative as a puppet)

PERFORMANCE ART – (use high abstraction, employ unusual and unique props, build a sound collage without words, and use creative movement and striking shapes, add random dialogue, thoughts, and tableaux – be VISUAL ARTISTS WORKING WITH A LIVING CANVAS.) (WEIGLER: Building Dialogue, Lyrics, and Choreography (Forms); BLOOM: Skill Building/Practicing & Structure)

Indicators of Success

Students will demonstrate understanding of specific theatre forms.

Students will be able to successfully engage in skill building in-role, including the application of multiple theatre forms to a given set of circumstances.

5. PLAYMAKING (10 minutes) **Xan** and **Joy** break the teachers into CASTS of 10 and challenge them to create a 1-2 MINUTE MAX original performance piece entitled ***Don't Be Disrespectin' Me***, using the following required ingredients: STORY COMPLAINT, SONG, and at least 1 OTHER THEATRE FORM. (WEIGLER: Rehearsing and Performing; BLOOM: Constructing and Producing) Don't forget to be dynamic and everyone must play a part!

Indicators of Success

Students will demonstrate the use of multiple theatre forms when constructing an original performance piece.

Students will be able to successfully construct and produce a short performance piece using multiple drama strategies and theatre forms.

6. **PERFORMANCE** (15 minutes) Each COMPANY will perform their rough outline of an original performance piece. (WEIGLER: Building Dialogue, Lyrics, and Choreography (Forms); BLOOM: Performing/Mastery and Connecting the Dots)

Indicators of Success

Students will demonstrate the ability to successfully perform an original piece before peers or an audience.

Students will demonstrate the ability to evaluate and again perform the same original piece.

Students will be able to perceive movement toward mastery when reflecting on their performance experience.

7. **UNPACK & PLAN** (15 minutes) **Joy** shows a short video clip of her 6th grade students working on creating an original performance piece. **Xan** and **Joy** very briefly “connect the dots,” talk about “the whole child chart,” discuss assessment strategies, and entertain questions. Then, teachers use the rest of the time in school teams working on the PLANNING TEMPLATE provided for them in their packets.

Drama Methods Bibliography for Elementary Teachers

Baldwin, Patrice. **Teaching Literacy through Drama/Creative Approaches.** Routledge Falmer, 2003. (ISBN: 0415255783) – *Teachers with curriculum integration training will love this book and find it easy to understand with practice.*

Bolton, Gavin. **Drama for Learning: Dorothy Heathcote’s Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education.** Heinemann, 1995. (ISBN: 043508643X) – *Advanced drama training helps here.*

McCaslin, Nellie. **Creative Drama in the Classroom and Beyond.** Longman, 2005. (ISBN – 0801330734) – *No training needed to use these drama methods ... most of the book is based in language arts.*

Wagner, Betty Jane. **Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium.** Calendar Islands Publishers, 1999. (ISBN: 1-893056-00-7) – *Leading by questioning technique clearly modeled in this book.*

Weigler, Will. **Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre.** Heinemann, 2001. (ISBN – 0325003408) – *Excellent for guiding teachers to create original SIFT performance pieces out of integrated curriculum content and student life skills needs.*

USOE Theatre Targets Portfolio and Theatre Core:

http://www.schools.utah.gov/curr/FineArt/Core_Curriculum/Elementary/default.htm

USOE Life Skills Core:

<http://www.usoe.k12.ut.us/curr/civics/lifeskills/index.htm>